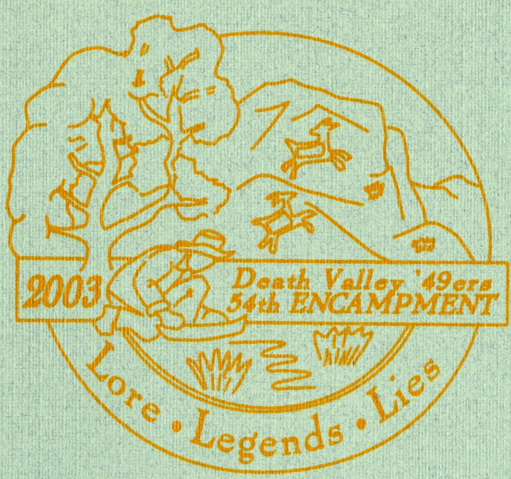
PANAMINT GOLD

NUGGETS OF POETRY
FROM AND ABOUT
DEATH VALLEY



Compiled by
Phee Sherline Graydon

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KEEPSAKE No. 43

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PANAMINT GOLD

NUGGETS OF POETRY
FROM AND ABOUT
DEATH VALLEY

Compiled by
Phee Sherline Graydon

Design and Layout by
Jean Johnson

Cloisonné Pin Design by
Joyce Tullis

About These Nuggets....

This collection of poetry about and from Death Valley was taken from a large body of material. As the committee worked its way through the poems, we were struck by the variety, wit, and beauty of the work and the fact that so many people spontaneously recorded their observations in poetry.

We set guidelines: the poetry must be related to Death Valley, selections would cover a wide a range of subject matter, and, though the work of recognized poets is represented, most of the material would be from amateurs—persons moved to write by the awe of the moment. Original spelling, and punctuation have been preserved.

My thanks to Jean Johnson, Marge Rothfuss, Shirley Harding, Esy Fields, and Blair Davenport for serving on the selection committee, to Ken Graydon for proof reading and for his on-going support of the project, to Jean Johnson for graphic design and layout, and to Joyce Tullis for the cloisonné logo design.

It's been a pleasure,

Phee Sherline Graydon, 2003 Death Valley '49er President

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«» A HALLOWED PLACE «»

Address Me A Letter

J. Emile "Aim" Morehardt *was a teacher, artist, poet, prospector, and Death Valley '49er president in 1969. From* A Thousand Acres of Nothing, *1968.*

My address is Death Valley,
Funeral Mts, Deadhorse Flat.
There's no post office number,
But it's where I hang my hat.
Out on a red volcanic butte
Where the devil must have sat
Is my lonely lonesome address . . . .
Tombstone Mts. . . .Deadhorse Flat.

I tried Starvation Canyon
But I didn't like it there
And Horsethief Springs in the Spectre Range
Was a mile beyond despair.
I like the Amargosa Sink
But it's better where I'm at
In my mansion mid the cactus
Watching rattlesnakes grow fat.

I've seen Blackwater Canyon
And I know the Last Chance Range,
The Ammonia Tanks in Ragtown Gulch
I find a welcome change.
But you'll almost always find me
On my ghastly gruesome plat,
With a skeleton crew on the graveyard shift
In Death Valley's Deadhorse Flat.

Desert Morning

Danny Ray Thomas *is a poet, musician, and Death Valley '49er Advisor.*

As the shadows slowly dwindle
Toward the desert dawn,
The cool of night is in retreat,
As morning sings her warming song.

The reddish hue of early morn'
Gives way to sparkling blue.
And wisps of clouds turn into mist,
As morning sings her song for you.

The sun pierces thru the mountain tops
Her rays strike the desert floor.
And glow of day spreads 'cross the land
As morning sings her song once more.

The day stands full and bright now
O'er the desert's panoramic view.
Come see these wonders again
tomorrow
As morning sings her song anew.

The Death Valley Year

Cynthia Woo *is a Death Valley National Park Service Volunteer.* © *1987*

The year has passed, life's circle completes another turn.
Death Valley is a great teacher. Again and again I learn
That Nature has a place and a role for every living thing,
And the life that seems to end in winter will begin anew in spring.

And this it teaches, too: the lesson of places like Rhyolite.
The wealth of precious ore is as elusive as the night.
To see a Death Valley sunrise and watch the dawn unfold
Is to realize that all that glitters is not gold.

Riches are not only what I can hold in my hand,
But the mountains, lakes, and forests of our America grand,
Her trees and birds and beasts, her water and her air,
A stewardship from a loving God, entrusted to our care.

Thank you, Death Valley for the wonders you share with me,
For filling my senses with miracles to hear and feel and see,
For tranquility, starry nights, unfettered birds, clear air.
Thank you, Death Valley, just for being there.

Water

Frances Paulsen *wrote a large number of poems about Death Valley in her collection,* Desert Dwellers *(Wetzel Publishing Co., Los Angeles, 1930).*

A tin can's good enough
To drink from when you're dry,
And you'll not complain about it
If the water's alkali!
You'll be glad to get it, brother.
You're in luck to get it too,
For without that bitter water
You'd never make it thro'.
So drink it from a tin can,
Warm and brackish, but it's wet!
And thank your God you got it!
Men who didn't are out there yet.

Emigrant Spring

Clear water, good water, cold
This small tank a haven.
Precious alike in this
wilderness waste
To man—or raven.

TO DEATH VALLEY

P. McDougall is a retired carpenter from Independence, California.

Death Valley, yes you are certainly rightly named,
The misery you've caused makes you widely famed.

There is your Furnace Creek, both warm and hot,
In summer you are nothing but a boiling pot.

Your rattlers, scorpions, and lizards as well,
Instead of on earth should all be in Hell.

Your surface of borax, sand, gravel and stone,
All mankind should let you severely alone.

You boast of Bad Water, and also the low spot,
In fact all you possess should be well forgot.

There is your Devil's Golf Course, the Hell you say,
My advice to all golfers is to stay away.

There is your poison water of which you boast,
Why, damn you, you are despised from coast to coast.

From Dante's Point may be seen Whitney, tallest of all,
Making your prize peak, Telescope, appear rather small.

Your Ubehebe Crater is just a big hole in the ground
And in it, nor near it, nothing of beauty is found.

Your so called Artists' Drive, crooked as a snake,
Is just another great big magnificent fake.

Your floor is strewn with bones of the dead,
To look your place over gives one a pain in the head.

Had God any respect or feeling for mankind
He would have fenced you with manproof blind.

Today you are called a Monument, and justly so
In memory to the lives you took in the long ago.

DEVIL'S PLOWED FIELD

Frances Paulsen

The Devil decided a farmer he'd be
(To choose such vocation the Devil's own fault)
So he plowed up Death Valley with a sizzling share
And sowed it with alkali, borax and salt.
He gave it salt water and heat quite intense,
And blew in some extra sand as he'd pass;
His crop was a stinking yellow-green weed,
And the salt marshes a large devil-grass.

«»EARLY WORKS «»

UNTITLED

***John Groscup**, a Jayhawker in 1849, put his experiences in rustic verse in 1885. His phonetic spelling reflects the problems poorly educated German immigrants experienced with English. Excerpts are from JA498 Jayhawker Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

...but still wee went on with Curage bold,
untill the City [Salt Lake} wee did be hold.
and then wee listened to talk untrue,
and laid us by some Months ore to.
Heare wee left fore the suthern rout,
and hired A pilot to Lead us About.
10 Dollers wee paid fore wagon each,
untill the Number A Hunderd Reached.
And thus you see wee did not no,
how slow wee ware Agoing to go.
and thus wee left the City bold,
all in serch fore the land of Gold.

[The wagon train set out on the Old Spanish Trail. Many split off to take a shortcut west of Cedar City, Utah, where they met an insurmountable obstacle, the headwaters of Beaver Dam Wash. Most of that party turned back to follow the original trail, but those who became the Death Valley '49ers took a trail that brought them to a strange land. Groscup continued his narrative:]

some Indians thare ware caught,
and in to camp ware brought,
and then wee tryed to get them to show
us the way wee ort to go
but this wee failed to do.
then on wee went as best wee could,
still trying hard to get some food
weeak and faint & starving to,
wee still this Desert must go threw.
but Alas some ware left be hind to stay,
which cased [caused] still harder Trials by the way,
When in the Grave wee lade them by,
not noing how soon that wee Might Die.
still on wee went as wee should,
to find some wauter if wee could.
at last A stream wee did Aspy,
and Glad wee ware that it was so ni,
but salt it was and wee could not Drink.

Groscup continued his story without rhyme and meter but closed with the following:

thare is stil Another seane ahead
that is brightter still to vew,
ware wee shall meat us [as] Brothers should
with Curage brave and true.

UNTITLED (Excerpts)

***Frances Mecum**, wife of Charles Mecum who was a member of the 1849 Death Valley party, wrote the following after a Jayhawker reunion in 1889. Her use of Biblical style shows a wry sense of humor. From JA738 Jayhawker Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Paragraphing changed for clarity.*

And in the 1st year, of the reign of Zachary, the Republican—
near the City of Gale, and the country around about,
even unto the river called Cedar Fork, there dwelt many husbandmen.

And rumors came from afar, of a land far to the westward,
where gold was to be found in great abundance.
And the young men, of the city of Gale and the region around about,
said among themselves.

Why stay we here, where corn bringeth but 5 pence a bushel?
If we remain here, we will dwell in poverty all the days of our life:
for our labor is vain and bringeth nought.

Let us take oxen, and wagons, and go up to that land;
and we will gather up gold, and fill our wagons,
and return to the land of our fathers; and we will go no more out forever.

And they gathered together, many wagons, and oxen, and much food.
And on the 5th day, of the month called April in the year 1849,
they started on their journey to the westward.

And there were musicians among them:
and when they camped at the setting of the sun, they prepared
the ground, and made merry, with the dance, and sound of the viol.

And when they reached the plains,
they shaved their heads, and suffered their beards to grow;
and took new names unto themselves.

And some reserved a scalp-lock on the crown of their head
after the manner of the Paiutes of the plains.
And all the members of the tribe of Jayhawk,
disguised themselves, and took new names.

And they clothed themselves with skins of wild animals
and out-Indianed the Indians themselves:
so that the red men fled, when they beheld them.

...And John, whose surname was Grosscup, made bread for the company,
and the loaves were hard, and enduring as the eternal hills:
and they likened them to Grindstones.
And the making of them was a secret: a lost art:
which the maker hath never revealed, to the children of men.

...This was the land, they long had sought:
but they found not gold in abundance, to be picked up by all who desired:
but they must labor and delve in the earth,
long ere they found even a small portion.

And some labored and found gold:
but it was soon 'blown in' at the mining towns;
and some found it not.

And they conformed to the customs of the land;
and gathered sacks, in which flour was wont to be shipped;
and made themselves breeches;
upon the rear of which were seen the mystic words,
Superfine and I X L.

Ode To Death Valley

***Pauline Gower**, with husband, Harry Gower, moved to Death Valley in 1919 and lived in a miner's shack. They moved to Death Valley Junction in 1930 where she managed the Amargosa Hotel until WWII. Created as a song this poem was published in 1928 as sheet music. Harry Gower was a prime mover in the borax industry and Death Valley. He wrote* 50 Years In Death Valley, Memoirs of a Borax Man. *Harry was a Death Valley '49er for a time.*

You are a land of mystery
Far far away from the sea,
Grim mountains meet grey desert sand,
Oh haunting fascinating land
Where sand dunes play and soft breezes stray,
Oh land of mystery;
Many have perished while fanned by your breath,
And thus you are called the Valley of Death!

But that ruthless mood of yours has passed,
And man has conquered you at last.
Your charms are so mystic, so grand and so true,
Your mountains are rugged, so purple and blue.
Your bright sparkling sunshine the whole live-long day
Brings golden glorious sunset,
Then day fades away;
The stars in the sky so swiftly appear,
My soul is inspired.
God's hand is here.

Samples of Paiute chant and poetry collected by Bourke Lee and published in his Death Valley, the Immortal Desert *(Ballantine Press © 1930.) He reports that two scouts in a pioneer party saw Paiute Indians chanting and dancing around a fire at a watering hole.*

UNTITLED

Tu-gwi-nur-ru-a tu-wip — The land is hungry
Un-kar-ti-si a-vwi-mi-ni — The ants are starving

WINTER

The red clouds of sunset are drifting
Like down on the peaks of the mountains.
The feathers of the reed are lying on the ground,
And the quails are perched in the pines.

STORM

On the peak of the mountain,
The eagle is dancing,
The tempest is roaring.

At morn the eagle will cry
On the further shore of the hills,
And a rainbow will be in the sky.

The Rattlesnake

Crawling along, crawling along
Through rocky canyon
Crawling along.

Through stony land, close to a rock
With head erect
You crawled along.

By the bush-cactus mound
You were passing along.
By the bush-cactus mound
You were passing along
Wriggling and crawling along.

DEATH VALLEY

L. Lucy, from Desert Magazine, 1961

Somewhere behind the Panamints
The sun slips out of sight
The searing heat that was intense
Now cools with coming night.

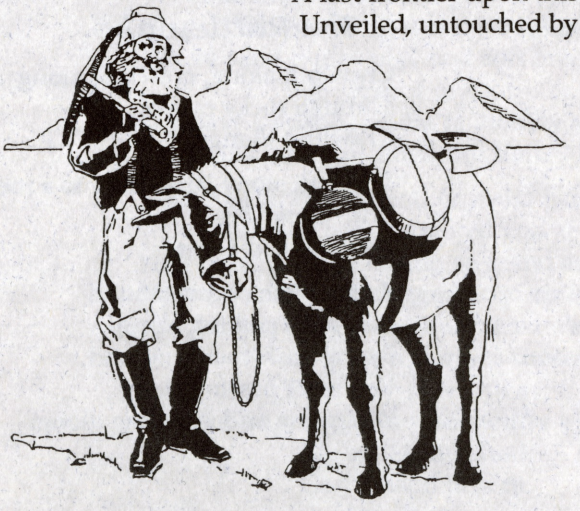
Death Valley lies so peaceful now
It's floor becomes a hand
To feed the creatures that somehow
Survive in this strange land.

The shifting sands that now lie still
A dune-field of design
Created with the Master's skill
Devised to awe mankind.

So this is where those worldly woes
Can't place their stress on me
And here my mind becomes unfogged
My thoughts are clear and free.

Where man does go about on earth
He contaminates the soil
He seeds the wounds that breed the scars
From efforts of his toil.

So if some way that we could save
This wild and virgin land
A last frontier upon this earth
Unveiled, untouched by man.



Rosie, We're Rich, She Burns Green

Ken Graydon, poet, songwriter, performer and '49er president in 2002. © 2001

The house was just a dugout closed in with walls of stone,
Tule thatching for a roof and floor of pounded sand
Where Rose and Aaron Winters did their best to make a home
And spent their days in prospecting the arid desert land.

Old Aaron loved the desert as Aaron loved his Rose.
One strike could ease the hardship of the poverty they knew
But fortune is a phantom, as every miner knows
And Aaron's luck stayed mostly bad and his disappointment grew.

One evening in the autumn came a wanderer to the door,
A borax hunter heading for the new Nevada claims.
He talked of its appearance, showed samples of the ore
And how to prove the borax by the color of the flames.

And it's goodbye to hardscrabble mining
To sourdough, hard bacon and beans.
The words resound through the darkness
"Rosie, we're rich. She burns green!"

Aaron's hopes were flying as the stranger took his road
And he and Rosie started down to Furnace Creek below
Where he had seen deposits much like those the stranger showed
Perhaps a white bonanza, as their hopes began to grow.

A flicker in the darkness, they watched as in a trance.
A moment passed and suddenly sweet Rosie gave a scream.
Like a wild Shoshone brave, old Aaron went a dancin'
Laughing, shouting, "Rosie, we're rich! She burns green!"

(Chorus)

On a ranch in Pahrump Valley they settled in to stay
To gentle days of slower pace than they had ever known
But barely three years later, sweet Rosie slipped away
To yet another paradise while Aaron carried on alone.

Now years have flown like swallows as swiftly as they came.
Old Aaron still is faithful to the memory of his queen,
Softly through his dreamin' he gently calls her name
Sweetly singing, "Rosie, we're rich. She burns green."

Pleasant Evening

"Aim" Morhardt. Sagebrush and Stars, *1978*

You'll always know a miner by his talk.
When all the world's asleep in righteous rest,
He's digging,
In absentia,
High grade ore
In metaphor.

Panamint Gold

Seldom Seen Slim *(Charles Ferge) was a prospector and Death Valley character. He died in 1968.*

Go way up high in the Panamints
That's what I was told
For all along in the Panamints
There's plenty of hidden gold!

When I first saw the Panamints
They stood so high and bold!

But I went up in the Panamints, and
I found some hidden GOLD
I panned the rock
The, GOLD I sold
And, that's my story of the
Panamint GOLD!

SHORTY HARRIS

Seldom Seen Slim*, from Death Valley National Park Service Archives*

I happen to be in town one night,
When I heard about Shorty Harris
And, his rich gold strike!

In my old car, with the gas tank filled,
I started out for the Panamint Hills
When I got off the highway, I was hard to beat
For I stepped on the gas, with both my feet!
I went over some hills, and
I landed in Harrisburg, with 4 one dollar bills
I put up my tent and slept on the ground,
Just below, where that high-grade was found!

Then, I hear 'round. . .they were telling
A prospector is a DAMN LIAR!. . .with a hole in the ground
And, Seldom Seen Slim. . . is one of them!

SHORTY HARRIS

Ken Graydon, © 2003

They buried him out next to Jim Dayton,
The Short Man has filed his last claim.
They planted him there where he wanted
A desert rock bearing his name.

He spoke of himself as "The Short Man,"
Though the name he was born with was Frank,
A scant five feet tall with his boots on
But nearer to twelve when he drank.

An eastern kid, orphaned at seven,
He rode the rails west in his teens.
He hit California with Ulysses Grant
Though the floor of the car lay between.

He headed for Leadville, then on to Idaho,
Montana, then Utah—too late.
To Tombstone, Virginia, then Bodie
And Silver Peak chasing his fate.

He hit every western state prospect
(He never quite made it to Nome)
'Till he landed in Panamint Valley,
A place he would learn to call home.

Panamint, Ballarat, Tonopah,
Greenwater, Rhyolite too,
The Short Man had prospected everywhere
By the time his wanderings were through.

He located Bullfrog and Harrisburg
And others wherever he went.
The money just flowed off like water.
He couldn't hold on to a cent.

When asked why he followed his rainbow
With hardly a dime to his name,
He replied, "Who the hell wants ten million?
It's the game, man, always the game."

It's near seventy years since the burying
But folks out here talk of him still
And there's more than a few who will tell you,
"The Short Man still walks through these hills."

Meditations

Attributed as "possibly by" Seldom Seen Slim, by "Aim" Morhardt in Death Valley Poems, *1951.*

I never knew a desert man
Who had a stomach ulcer,
I've seen a few go mad
But t'was a pleasant sort of folly;
And though the gold we seek
Is hard as all-get-out to come by,
The gold we get is clean, and new,
And decked with desert holly.

The rules of nature never change,
And as an adversary
The deal is straight, and if you lose
You've but yourself to blame.
While if you buck your fellow man
In greed and with suspicion,
You're often less than honest
Or you cannot win the game.

I'd rather go a dozen miles
To get to where I'm going,
With no one near to bother me,
And just clean mountain air;
Than take a taxi sixteen blocks
To some bleak concrete building
With sour looks and city smells
And strange unfriendly stare.

You call it civilization
But to me it's only foolish
When you've open space and wind and sun
And elbow room to roam.
You call it culture with its artificial neon glitter
But it's not what I call living
And it's not what I call home.

Though I surely can't deny
What mass production means to humans.
Man was built for something simple
Room to wander, space to see;
And all I'm pointing out is this—
I don't want any stomach ulcers
And if I'm crazy—well,—
Out here it only bothers me.

The Saga Of Borax Bill

***Curley Fletcher**, 1892-1954, wrote "Strawberry Roan" in 1915, published in 1917. As a miner, he discovered high grade scheelite ore in Darwin in 1940. He moved to Bishop and mined tungsten during WWII.*

The day of the long line team is o'er,
The long-line teamster is seen no more,
The cadent notes of the leader's chimes
Are forever buried in bygone times.

Old Borax Bill was a tough old pill,
An old case-hardened sinner
Who went his ways in the early days,
An old time long-line skinner.

He knew more schemes for jerk-line teams
Than anyone of his time:
He could curse by rote and swear by note,
To music, rhythm and rhyme.

He could drive more span than any man,
And where his leaders are
Is out of sight, where it takes till night
For the wheelers to get that far.

For when to go and where to "whoa,"
A long distance telephone
Was hanging near the leader's ear,
To make Bill's wishes known.

He gave mules hell but he fed them well
And he knew just how to drive;
He could haul more load on a sandy road
Than any man alive.

On his wheeler alone, like a king athrone,
He would tell them what to do
And when he spoke, the hamestrings broke,
Or the chains and stretchers flew.

Old Bill was rough, but he knew his stuff
On the up grade of a hill,
And a lazy mule was just a fool
To loaf with Borax Bill.

A hybrid late made coyote bait
Out on the desert's stones.
The team went on in the early dawn,
As the buzzards picked his bones.

He could make a turn with room to burn,
And never a mule to stand,
And when he'd shout the pointers out,
Their bellies would hit the sand.

His voice would ring up in the swing,
Those mules would hop across
Again and again o'er a tightened chain
For they knew that he was boss.

He kept some rocks in the jockey-box
To throw at a lazy team;
When he shied a stone a mule would groan
And then Old Bill would scream—

"Get out and hit that collar and bit,
You lazy son-of-a-jack,
I'll be up on you, snide, and tan your hide
To hang upon the rack."

He'd often say in his blasphemous way,
That after he had died
He'd be no stranger at the manger
Where the souls of mules are tied.

And that Borax Smith was just a myth,
With trimmings in between;
He had blown more borax thru his thorax
Than Smith had ever seen.

Now a mule I judge will hold a grudge
Until his dying day;
An abusive debt he'll not forget,
And with interest he'll repay.

At any rate, one evening late
Old Bill went on the "prod,"
With this in mind he got behind
A mule just newly shod.

With all his might and careful sight
This beast took perfect aim,
In a manner neat with both hind feet
He handed Bill the same.

Oh, what a lick was that mighty kick,
And it caught Bill unaware.
With a dismal howl, and a cursing growl,
Bill folded up right there.

When he was found upon the ground
His eyes were seen to glisten
And in his breath was the rattle of death
As he called for his friends to listen

From where he lay they heard him say,
"Ain't he a holy terror.
Here I'm busted by a mule I trusted
Looks like I made an error.

"Now it may be so that it's hot below.
Boys, will you do me a turn
Just send that fool of a kickin' mule
Right along with me to burn."

Old Borax Bill lies o'er the hill,
Now numbered with the dead
And you may laugh at his epitaph
For here is what it said.

"Beneath this spot where it's plenty hot,
Lie the bones of a hardened sinner;
Don't be bereft though it's all that's left
Of Borax Bill, mule-skinner."

If he's above or below, I don't know,
Old Bill was kinda sharp.
When they shuffled the deck after the wreck
Bill may have laid hold of a harp.

He knew no school but the hybrid mule,
And he kept them fat and shod;
Old Bill worked hard and he drew his card
That squared his account with God.

The day of the long-line team is o'er
The long-line teamster is seen no more.
The cadent notes of the leader's chimes
Are forever buried in bygone times.

DESERTED DIGGINGS

Ardis Manley Walker. *From* Sierra Nevada Sequence, *Sierra Trails Press, 1968, written in sonnet form. Ardis was the '49er President in 1952.*

Eternal wilderness, these hills he trod
Bear dimming scars of trail and prospect hole.
Here lies his battered boot, its twisted sole
Grass-rooted. Here a swell of wind-parched sod
Holds rubrock, rusty pick, and shattered clod.
In gutted earth he toiled, a patient mole,
Sun-starved; in darkness sought his aureate goal;
In sightless faith, his fortune or his God.

Eroded now his empty workings lie
Where on the dump a muted silence reigns.
Here in the chill of a November dawn,
Paused from the hunt, I search the morning sky.
Now gold is sunburst over distant plains;
And now steps forth a timid, questing fawn.

MEWS OF THE WILDCAT

From **The Death Valley Chuckwalla**, *May 1907, published in Greenwater touting itself: "On the Desert, of the Desert, for the Desert...A Magazine for Men."*

Millions, millions, everywhere,
And everyone in sight;
If you've a mine put up this sign,
For suckers wish to bite
We're shipping ore, we've struck the lead,
Our shaft is going down,
We've caught the pitch, the vein is rich,
We know it's in the ground.
Our stock is low, it has to go,
To bring us in the mon,
Now please don't miss a chance like this,
And spoil our little fun.
Some stock we'll spare, one cent per share,
You pay whene'er you can,
A share or two, we'll sell to you
On the installment plan.
Millions, millions everywhere,
And everyone in sight,
The game is fine, we have a mine–
Have we? I guess not quite.

Untitled

From Unnatural History of Death Valley *by Paul Bailey (Chalfant Press, 1978).*

Panamint, Panamint, city of gold
Where women were crazy sweaty and bold
And the likker would pizen a sidewinder's hole.
One year at Panamint made any man old.

Death Valley Limerick

That old desert rat from Zabriskie,
And his jackass, especially friskie,
Claimed every rock from his mine,
Came out gold every time.
Why? Because he dipped horney toads in his whiskey.

TEN LITTLE MINERS

"Aim" Morehardt. *From* A Thousand Acres of Nothing, *(Chalfant Press, 1970).*

Ten little miners digging in a mine,
One lit a short fuse and then there were nine.

Nine little miners working long and late,
One didn't scale the roof and then there were eight.

Eight little miners raising to heaven,
One liked to drill dry...eventually there were seven.

Seven little miners in quite a fix,
Blew out the station timbers and then there were six.

Six little miners all quite alive,
One drilled a missed shot and that left five.

Five little miners cobbing their ore,
One didn't close the chute and then there were four.

Four little miners out on a spree,
One didn't make it back and so there were three.

Three little miners feeling good as new,
One forgot his hard hat and that left two.

Two little miners graveyard shift done,
One fell down an open raise and then there was one.

One little miner, his last shift done,
Got a job baling hay . . . and then there were none.

Mining's A Fine Occupation

"Aim" Morhardt. From A Thousand Acres of Nothing *(Chalfant Press, 1968).*

Oh, Clancy and I, we got started
On a prospect in Lower Cowhide.
We were happy and gay, till we found out one day
That our gold was all bismuth oxide!

Oh Jerry and me, we went out on a spree.
We had silver without any doubt.
We were right at the peak for a part of a week
Then our wee little pocket pinched out!

Oh, mining's a fine occupation.
It's a gamble to be mighty frank.
What you need first is hope, then a very strong back
And a few thousand bucks in the bank.

Now the scheelite lamped on a whole mountain.
Yes, at night it would give you a fright.
So we put in a winze and some track and a bin.
Wouldn't you know, it was hydrozincite!

Yes, these verses continue forever.
Lots of prospects but never a mine.
While the fresh air is great, I am sad to relate
That I never can make a thin dime.

Oh, mining's fine occupation.
It beats living in cities, I guess.
But I never found anything I ever did
That ended up paying me less.

Comments On Desert Living From The Chuckwalla

- A sunburnt man, like sunburnt gold, is frequently overlooked by our white-faced society.

- Under ordinary conditions a man may always be a man, but on the desert a fool soon becomes a friend of the coyotes.

- Death Valley cools the adjacent desert by causing air currents, formed by the constantly rising, and expanding of its superheated air. It is Nature's only attempt to conciliate mankind who has intruded upon these secluded preserves.

Last Camp

"Aim" Morhardt. *From* Death Valley Poems *(Chalfant Press, Bishop, CA, 1951).*

On Aguerreberry point he stood
An old man, burro close beside;
And watched Death Valley, far below
Drink up the night's advancing tide.

Beyond him range on range grew dark,
Behind him gold sky paled to grey,
And still he stood until the evening
Star crowned night beyond the day.

He turned and fumbled with a rope:
"A little grub?" he softly said,
"Before I turn you loose to graze
And pick myself a bed."

The burro twitched a patient ear,
He had the whole long night to graze
With chilling hands the old man coaxed
A mesquite root into a blaze.

"Go on," he said, the jack moved off.
"Goodbye," he whispered, "find a mate.
There's wild ones here, you saw the sign
Yourself today—it's not too late."

He rolled the tarp out, ate a bite
Washed up his kit and laid it there
The night was chilly now with stars
Bright tapestry on silent air.

He gazed across the mighty rift
That lay below him in the night.
"I hope that jack's got sense," he mused.
"I guess they'll take him back all right."

And so he lay down while the wind
Went whispering sadly overhead—
The morning sun stood high
Before the jack grazed back and found him dead.

They never stuck a marker up—
Shucks, no one even knew his name.
"He picked a good view, "someone said,
"Ain't no one going to jump his claim."

Some guy did put a notice out—
French Pete, "This claim is six by four,
Location work all done, "he put,
And added "Hope he found good ore."

THE FUNERAL RANGE

Ned White *(1873-1935), known as "The Miner's Poet," lived and worked around Bisbee, Arizona. He wrote one poem about Death Valley found in* Ned White, Arizona's Bard of Brewery Gulch *by Marion White McKinney (The Golden Bell Press, 1965).*

There's a place they call Ghost
Canyon,
Down in the Funeral Range,
Where the hot winds from Death
Valley
Seem to whisper stories strange;
Where bleached bones of
prospectors
Are strewed along the line
Down toward the Skeleton Peak
On the road to the Coffin Mine.

We camped one night in a gully
Where thorny cacti grow,
Where Peg-Leg Smith, and
Frenchy
Camped many long years ago,
We found a pile of nuggets
In an old abandoned drift
When we went to work at midnight
To work on the graveyard shift.

The moon rose over the desert,
We heard the coyotes yell:
We thought of souls in torture—
We thought of the fiends of Hell.
Maybe we were cowards
Because our blood ran cold—
When we saw a phantom, coming,
Like a goblin in days of old.

It came toward us over the desert,
And then began to speak,
His voice was low and shaky
Like someone who is old and weak.
It said, "In me, behold
The Mogul of Death Valley—
The Guardian of its Gold."

Well we didn't linger, Mister—
There, on the graveyard shift,
With his filmy ghostship
prowling
In the old abandoned drift.
We said good-bye to Death
Valley,
And good-bye to the Funeral
Range.
If anyone wants the Coffin Mine
They can take it and keep the
change.

If you doubt what here is written—
If the truth you would gainsay—
Go yourselves into Death Valley,
See the bones along the way. . .
Hear the winds from Hell's
scorched acres,
As they whisper stories strange;
Go and find the place, Ghost
Canyon
Down in the Funeral Range.

THE GHOSTS AT DIAMOND BAR

Bruce Kiscaddon *(1878-1950) worked on a ranch in Colorado, and served in WWI in France. In the late 1920s, he played bit parts in movies. He wrote nearly 400 poems about every part of his life. For a while, he worked in the Mojave and Death Valley areas. From Cowboy Poetry,* Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon, *Cowboy Miner Productions.*

'Twas a winter night at the Diamond Bar,
The wind was blowin' cold.
The Dipper swung 'round the dim North Star
And the night was growin' old.
But I had some wood that was dry and good,
So I let the cold wind whine.
I was safe and snug with a gallon jug
Of Death Valley Slim's* moonshine.

Across the stove from where I sat
Stood a figger straight and tall.
He had no coat, he had no hat,
He must have come through the wall.
He pointed away toward a rocky shelf
That was up on the side of a hill.
He was one of the bunch the Injuns skelped
When they raided the old ore mill.

I nodded and passed the gallon jug.
He needed a drink or two.
But he only shrugged and shook his head;
That was sumpthin' he could not do.
I set the jug down on the floor;
Then my eyes popped open wide.
There had been jest one; now a couple more
Was a standin' there by his side.

They would each one point with a ghostly hand
Where my old harmonica lay.
By signs they made me understand
They wanted that I should play.
So I played 'em "The Grave on the Lone Prairie,"
And "The Dyin' Ranger" too.
And twenty odd ghosts surrounded me
Before I was halfway through.

I played 'em the old "Rye Whisky" tune
And they waltzed it 'round and 'round.
But I felt no weight on the floor of the room

And their feet made never a sound.
Then "Rosie O'Grady" and "Over the Waves,"
They waltzed with keen delight.
Them wandering spirits out of their graves
Was havin' a time that night.

They motioned that I should drink once more.
That was easy to understand.
With noiseless feet, they stomped the floor
And patted their phantom hands.
When I seen 'em smile I changed my style.
I played old "Larry McGee,"
They wanted something with a lilt and swing
And they stepped it light and free.

But jest as the thing was goin' grand,
There was sumpthin' spoiled the show.
There wasn't a drop in the coal oil can,
And the lamp was burnin' low.
I stopped and drunk me a hefty slug
And a thought come to mind.
I filled the lamp from the moonshine jug
And she blazed like a neon sign.

There was battered hats on the buckaroos.
Old miners with unshaved jaws,
Three Wallapi bucks were in there too,
And a couple Mohave squaws.
The next was the old time "Chicken Reel,"
And you'd orta seen 'em go.
They would jig on the corners before they'd wheel
And give it the heel and toe.

I knew they wouldn't be there fer long.
It would soon be breakin' day.
And I wanted to sing 'em a good old song
Before they went on their way.
So I sung like I had never sung before,
Til the last of the crowd was gone.
And when I opened the ranch house door,
The day was beginning to dawn.

Yes, the desert trails have their own weird tales
That few of us mortals know.
And I'll never forget that crowd I met
On that night so long ago.
Some time I will meet them again maybe,
Though I don't know where they are.
But why did they come to visit me,
That night at the Diamond Bar?

**Death Valley Slim (Ernest Madison) was a saloon owner and troublemaker in 1906. Charles Brown, then deputy sheriff of Greenwater, tracked him down, fought, and handcuffed him. He took Slim home since there was no jail. Slim escaped, but Brown over-powered him again and wired another sheriff, who told him to turn Slim loose but kill him if he made trouble again. Slim behaved himself from then on. Charles Brown is the grandfather of Susan Sorrell, owner and manager of Shoshone.*

«» EVENTS & PLACES «»

SUSAN'S TOWN

***Shirley Harding**, '49er President elect and Death Valley National Park volunteer.*

A little southeast of Death Valley
On the Amargosa River bank
There's a small town named Shoshone.
"Dad" Fairbanks is the man to thank.

In nineteen o-eight he left Greenwater.
Took the buildings, his kith and kin.
Moved everything to Shoshone
And started all over again.

"Dad" Fairbanks was Susan's great grandpa.
Celeste was his loving wife.
Their daughter, Stella, inherited Shoshone
And cared for it the rest of her life.

Stella married Charley Brown.
Their daughter, Bernice, was born.
She, in turn, inherited Shoshone
And carefully cared for the people and the town.

And Susan is Bernice's daughter,
Shoshone now her responsibility.
Four generations of capable women
Have lovingly cared for this desert community.

WINTER IN MANZANAR

***Yutaka Nakay**, age 16. Reprinted from the* Manzanar Free Press, *January 1943. During World War II, Japanese people from the Los Angeles area were impounded in Manzanar, a relocation camp in Owens Valley. Some of the people there were moved to Cow Creek in Death Valley. Manzanar Museum is administered by Death Valley National Park.*

It's winter in Manzanar
And stars are twinkling as before.
Beyond the stillness of Manzanar
Lie the great mountains of white snow.
The winds howling disturbs the night
As the people pull their covers more tight.
For it's winter in Manzanar
With the icy coldness everywhere.

Lonely Night

***Hiroshi Tani** Reprinted from the* Manzanar Free Press, *January 1943. Translated from Japanese.*

A lone light is sighted from a hill
Silent night is deepening
The whistle streams with a long trail
The vision of the home country appears
And falls upon the shadowy mountain ranges.

Tears stream from my eyes
Like a man desperate and unsaveable
Cricket sings from the brush
The group of dark houses stand still.

In my cheerless mind the rhythm of stream performs
As I lay down burning rhythm brew up to the stars.
The vision of the home country appears
And falls upon the shadowy mountain ranges.

PETROGLYPHS

***Don Meyer** is a member of the Death Valley Hikers Association.*

I learned one thing
Here
Among the historic signs
Peaks, petroglyphs
Ancient pines.
I am going to try and endure
At least for a while
But one thing that is sure
Is
That right now
I am here.

MOUNTAIN CLIMB

Don Meyer

I stand back and look at the peak
Majestic
In all of its afternoon glory
The late sun shining on it
Purple and gold
The shadow creeping up its side
As I did once
Slowly
The ridges and valleys
Standing out in sharp relief
Against the darkened back the shelf
Which huddled me
Gave me rest
Jutting out in arrogance
Into the thin disappearing air
I stopped there
For a while
Continued on
Hand over weary hand
Until the day was nearly done
And then turned back
Reluctantly
Knowingly
Darkness brings danger
And one seeks safer heights
With the slowly sinking sun
But now I wonder
If I had continued on
Straddling the furthest point
Following the moving sun
Would things be changed
somehow
Would the peak look the same
And would I
Now
Be a different man.

Untitled

This poem, written by ***Matt Ryan*** *or his wife, Rosemary, was posted in the public restroom at Emigrant Ranger Station in the 1960s.*

This is a very pleasant place
To comb your hair and wash your face;
There is a cozy little seat
Where you can smoke your cigarette,
But please refrain for evermore
From putting ashes on the floor,
And the way to be polite,
Keep used tissue out of sight;
Do not scatter all around
Empty cans upon the ground.
Put your trash and empty tins
In the handy garbage bins.
If these rules you'll keep in view
We'll all be happy same as you.

Roll Call

"Aim" Morhardt. From Death Valley Poems, *1951,*

Luster of sunlight lies upon them,
Wasteland wanderers know them well,
Some are names from the back of nowhere
Some are places just short of hell.

Roster of dreams and faded glories,
Echoes of tragedy, laughter, pain;
Names for the songs of a last lost minstrel
Wandering lonely on lonely plain.

Wildrose Canyon and Ballarat,
Indian Ranch and Sulphur Spring ;
Needle Peak and Wingate Pass,
Hear how the names of the desert sing.

Ubehebe and Maturango,
Shoshone, Tecopa and Coso View;
Never an Indian now to call them,
Only a pine nut camp or two.

Avawatz, Bad Water, Owl's Head Mountains,
Cerro Gordo and Saline Camp;
Rattlesnake Cabin and Rhyolite,
Here is history's fading stamp.

Old Confidence Mill and Twelve Mile Spring,
Daylight Pass and Furnace Creek;
These are the tombs of pioneers,
Telescope Mountain and Pinto Peak.

Shadow Valley and Jubilee Pass,
Many the ghosts that walk the range.
Last Chance Mountains and Tinemaha,
Memories time can never change.

These and a hundred others ring
Like golden coins on an old time bar
Where now through a sagging broken door
Shines only the tranquil evening star.

Rhyolite

Ken Graydon © 2002

It's nineteen-o-five out in western Nevada
And the desert is coming alive.
They've staked out a town where there used to be sagebrush
And the folks have begun to arrive.
Just up from Bullfrog a half mile or so
Montgomery-Shoshone is making a show.
The miners are packed and they're ready to go
To Rhyolite—heeding the call.

Rhyolite, Rhyolite
Everyone's heading for Rhyolite.
Biggest bonanza in the wide open west
Every prospector is joining the quest.
Of all the boom towns, she's surely the best.
It's Rhyolite, queen of them all.

It's nineteen-o-seven in western Nevada
And Golden Street shines in the night
With three-story buildings of concrete and stone
All bathed in electrical light.
There's three thousand people all milling around.
The uproar goes on though the sun has gone down.
The elephants came just to look at the town
Of Rhyolite—belle of the ball.

Rhyolite, Rhyolite
Everything's booming in Rhyolite.
The railroads are in and they're building a jail.
There's a genuine post office handling the mail.
Everyone's swinging the world by the tail
In Rhyolite—towering tall.

It's nineteen-o-nine out in western Nevada
And it looks like we're losing the bloom.
There's only eight hundred souls left in the town.
It's a bust now instead of a boom.
The Gold Bar and Homestake and Denver are through.
The Tramp and the Bullfrog are memories too.
There isn't much left for a miner to do
In Rhyolite—bitter as gall.

Rhyolite, Rhyolite
Everyone's leaving poor Rhyolite.
The buildings stand empty, the streets have gone still.
There's nobody working the mines on the hill.
The promise of riches will go unfulfilled
In Rhyolite—after the fall.

It's nineteen-eleven in western Nevada
And Rhyolite sleeps in the sun. . .

They String You Up Twice in Skidoo

Ken Graydon © 2003

In a gruesome true mining camp story, a drunk, Hootch Simpson, killed a man and was lynched by the victim's friends. His body was exhumed and he was hanged again so pictures could be taken, legend says, for a newsman. Actually, a doctor wanted a photo.

You've heard of the bad man from Bodie,
A wild desperado, it's true.
Well, this camp on the hill
It would give him a chill
'Cause they string you up twice in Skidoo.

There's some hit this camp like a cyclone
Just lookin' for mischief to do.
There's just one detail—
They don't need a jail
'Cause they string you up twice in Skidoo.

Hootch Simpson had one drink too many.
His judgment was shot through and through.
He acted the villain
And committed a killin'
So they strung him up fast in Skidoo.

When the newsmen arrived the next morning
Asking "What had the boys been up to?"
Hootch was buried by then
So they exhumed him again
And they strung him up twice in Skidoo.

If you've got your mind set on trouble
Well, this camp can give it to you
So just use your head
And go elsewhere instead,
'Cause they string you up twice in Skidoo.

DEATH VALLEY

Nancy E. Muleady, former Death Valley National Park Ranger

Believe it or not, there's a place here on earth
So great in its length and wide in its girth,
That it boggles the mind how a handful of rangers
Can manage to manage so many new strangers.

They come to expore and to hike with interpreters.
The castle and sand dunes are all worth a visit here.
They come in the spring to find Panamint daisies,
The good . . . and the bad, and a few of the crazies.

Sometimes it's so quiet, that it may just appear
That we only rake tracks the best part of the year.
But don't be deceived, events break with a roar,
So many, in fact, we can't keep the score!

On Sunday it started, the next forty-eight hours
Would tax all the rangers beyond natural powers.
A man was arrested for driving while drunk.
Three hours drive to the jail, and a place in a bunk.

Of course in the midst of the daily routine
We mounted a search and explored the whole scene.
A man who had driven off road left his clues.
Was he lost or depressed? Well, we followed his shoes.

Then on two separate occasions, cars managed to roll.
The rescue squad went, stress was taking its toll.
Respond to a nose bleed, a scorpion bite!
A three a.m. fire alarm in the night.

But you better sit down for things really went sour.
All hell then broke loose in the space of an hour.
A heart attack came. Flight for Life was the relay,
Then a man shot a rifle twenty yards off the highway.

Clearing the shooting, black smoke did appear
On the road to Towne's Pass, and no reason was clear.
Code three up the road to a vehicle fire,
A ball of orange flames, nothing left, not a tire.

Of course the next call was not at our leisure.
A man hit his head and was having a seizure!
The SAR chopper flew the medics on in,
C-spine and I-V . . . his life we did win.

It's tough to relax just to take a spare moment
To think and reflect on this fragile monument.
Too few rangers are here. We're stretched to the end
Keeping the desert safe is an ongoing trend.

And so too, the rangers need a time to relax
To escape this grand place and regroup with the facts.
When returning from leaving we take a deep breath.
We are coming back home. Yes, we're getting near Death.

DESCENDANT'S POEM

***Will Bedell**, age 8, is a descendant of Harry and Mary Wade, who were in Death Valley in 1849. Written in 1999, it was recited at the 50th Encampment.*

So, what's a descendant?
I am one they say
So I'd like to explain it
The Wade family way.

It seems it all started
When gold fever hit
And Henry Wade senior told his family
"We're taking a trip!"

Arriving too late to join others
In the city of Salt Lake
The Wades traveled behind
And found their own route they would have to make.

The Amargosa Desert
And the Panamint Range
Appeared overwhelming
And things had to change.

There was no more flour
The oxman had split.
Now Harry and his family
Were in quite a fix.

Using all of his know-how
And a strong pioneer spirit
Harry junior and his father
Found a way to get through it.

It took lots of courage.
They almost didn't survive.
I'm glad they did, though.
This descendant's glad to be alive.

Library of Congress

DESERT RAT, NEW STYLE

Paul Sanford. *From a* Zamorano Club *imprint, a collection of desert poetry by numerous authors. Lake Mojave Press, 1990.*

We are off to the hills, in the morning, for gold,
To locate a placer, a lode, or a mine,
We have pored over maps, all the legends retold,
We have it all figured—we're right on the line.

There'll be plenty of treasure and ore of the best,
There'll be plenty of pleasure no money can buy,
In the high, fleecy clouds creeping over a crest,
Shading iron-ribbed hills where they climb to the sky.

Someone will strike it—possibly me,
It ought to be me! I'm sure that it will!
For look at the treasure that I've found before,
All the wide, rolling steeps, piling ridge over hill;

All the forest and meadow, smoothing hard lines of stone
Into mountain and valley, too wild for a name;
With little lost lakes, where the trout flip at morn;
Where the spirit finds beauty, and the hungry find game.

We're off to the hills, in the morning, for gold!
We'll locate a placer, a lode, or a mine;
Or, a gold, basking mountain, a silver stream, icy cold.
Will you come? It's a deal! Happy hunting! All's fine!

JOSHUA TREES

Mary E. Burum. *From a* Zamorano Club *imprint. Lake Mojave Press, 1990.*

Dumb guardians of desert lands,
With lifted arms and speaking hands,
What greetings do you signal each to each?
Warnings of wind or desert showers?
Fraternal salutation?
Or sly derision of the antics
Of the human population?

«» '49er MEMORIES «»

Texas Springs

***Dorothy Cragan**. From* My Land! Poems and Pictures of the Sierra and Death Valley, *Independence, California, 1954.*

The hills threw back in soft refrain
The words of "O Susanna"
And "Yankee Doodle" filled the air
And then the sweet "Hosanna."

The '49ers sang their songs
In voices full and free.
I wonder, if they sang as well
As we sang in '53?

THE FORTY-NINERS

***John Hilton**, renowned for his desert scenes in oils, was a major figure in the Encampment art show. The following words, set to music, became the official song of the Death Valley '49ers. Proceeds from the music were used to mark Death Valley memorials and further a permanent museum. © 1954*

Oh, the forty-niners rolled across Death Valley
And they braved the burning wastes and barren sand.
But the heat and thirst and danger of Death Valley
Didn't dim their golden dreams of promised land.

Forty-niners, forty-niners
Didn't dim their golden dreams of promised land.

Oh, they didn't know that they were making history
As they pushed their tired oxen with the goad.
They had no time to dream of being heros.
They were busy trudging down the dusty road.

Forty-niners, forty-niners
They were busy trudging down the dusty road.

Oh, you're more than just a mem'ry, forty-niners,
And your bravery can never all be told.
You will live within our hearts, oh forty-niners,
For you blazed a trail to destiny and gold.

Forty-niners, forty-niners
For you blazed a trail to destiny and gold.

THEY'RE MOSTLY GONE NOW...

Gene Hoffman was the '49er Secretary from 1955-63. ©1993.

They're mostly gone now...
Some for many years,
Those venerated sages who once regaled us
With their wisdom, wit and laughter, sometimes tears.

They told yams of desert and Death Valley lore,
History and humor, tall tales galore.
Eager debaters they were
Sure to rise quickly and speak at every chance.

Wide leather belts hung 'round ample girth
Huge silver-turquoise buckles held askance.

They could argue flinty-serious (or in mirth)
Endless details on topics large or small
About Indian baskets, display cases, burrows, bylaws, budgets
Wherewithal
For the "Music and Sanitation Committee"
Crowd control and law.

Stout and brawny fellows too, they were
With sturdy sounding names like Savage, Kratger, Fear and Burr.

Their roots were pioneer,
Men of vision, foresight, deep moral accord
Names always to revere...
Horace Albright, 'Aim Morhardt,
John Anson Ford.

They watch us still today
Gazing down from Peg Lewis' old Stove Pipe parlor wall,
Bible names like Matthew, Thomas, Joseph and Paul.
Rhythmic names with flowing tone,
Ralph Palmer Merritt, Phil Townsend Hanna, Arthur,
And Ardis Manly Walker. How longingly we recall.
Benign participants they are yet
Some immortalized by John Hilton's own hand and brush.

And if, sometime you'll go
Quietly and alone far out
Among the sand dunes' early dawn and silent hush
You'll hear them gently whisper
On a soft, caressing breeze,
Don't forget us...please.
Don't forget us and how this all began.

A '49ER'S PRAYER

R.E. Hastings *wrote this in tribute to the 50th annual Encampment* ©1999.

My weary bones were achin' and tossin' in my bed
'Cause bits of rhymes and phrases kept runnin' through my head.
They finally started linin' up and I had to come around,
And I got up in the darkness to quickly write them down.

And I called it "A '49er's Prayer"

Thanks be to God for good friends like you
And the beautiful clear desert skies
With stars like the spotlights from heaven above
To pleasure our tiring eyes.

And thanks for the things you can see if you will
The mountains, and sand on the dunes
The raven and grackle that visit our camp
Coyotes a'makin their tunes.

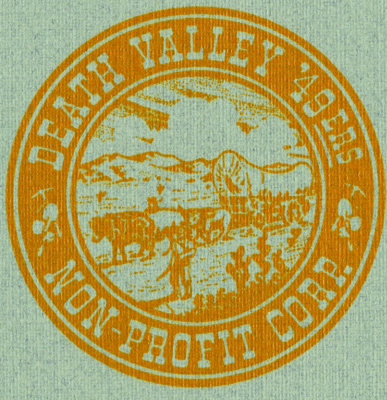
And thanks for the hope we will meet here again
To take in this wondrous sight
And meet once again with friends we have known
To sing by the campfire's light.

And if we should never again get the chance
To stand in this wonderful spot
Here's hoping that heaven will give us a place
That reminds us of this one a lot.

DEATH VALLEY '49ER PUBLICATIONS IN PRINT

50 Years in Death Valley, Memoirs of a Borax Man, Harry Gower
The Lost '49er Journal of Louis Nusbaumer, George Koenig
Proceedings: Sixth Death Valley Conference on History...
Proceedings: Fifth Death Valley Conference on History...
An Unnatural History of Death Valley, Paul Bailey
A Naturalist's Death Valley, Dr. Edmund Yeager
This Place Called Death Valley, in Japanese
This Place Called Death Valley, in German
This Place Called Death Valley, in English
This Place Called Death Valley, in French
Death Valley in 1849, John Southworth
Goodbye Death Valley!, L. Burr Belden
Death Valley Tailings, George Koenig
Death Valley Tales, Eleven Authors

Death Valley '49ers, Inc. is a non profit, volunteer organization whose mission is to promote understanding and appreciation of Death Valley and its history. Its only source of funding is through memberships and donations. It holds an annual encampment in November in Death Valley for members to learn about, celebrate, and enjoy the Death Valley area, and it provides scholarships to deserving high school graduates from the area to further their education. The '49ers work in cooperation with the National Park Service. Annual membership is open to all, and a yearly Keepsake is provided for each membership in keeping with our mission. Please visit our website at <www.deathvalley49ers.org> or write: P.O. Box 338, Death Valley, CA 92328.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